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U.S. EPA urges Navajo people to waive rights to future reimbursement claims

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz.—Navajo Nation President Russell Begaye warns tribal members against signing reimbursement claim forms being distributed by the U.S. EPA.

On August 11, the Navajo Nation Office of the President and Vice President received reports that the EPA has actively been distributed Standard Form No. 95, which, if signed will waive future claims for damages or injuries.

“The federal government is asking our people to waive their future rights,” said President Begaye. “They know that without the waiver they will be paying millions to our people.

“It’s simple: they are protecting themselves at the expense of the Navajo people and it is outrageous,” he added.

The form states the following, “I certify that the amount of claim covers only damages and injuries caused by the incident above and agree to accept said amount in full satisfaction and final settlement of this claim.”

President Begaye is especially concerned for Navajo elders, some of whom many not know what they are signing, except for the fact that will receive money.

Navajo Nation Attorney General Ethel Branch said all signors will be limited to the specific claims filed, and any future claims for injuries caused by the Gold King Mine will be waived.

“Form number 95 will settle for current claims and preclude all future claims from the spill,” Branch said.

“The U.S. EPA has admitted they are at fault and stated this disaster will last for decades. This is unacceptable. The damages to our people will be long term and the Navajo Nation will not settle for pennies. I have consistently stated that the Navajo people deserve to be compensated for every penny lost. I will not allow fine print to let U.S. EPA off the hook. The Navajo people deserve better from the federal government,” said President Begaye.

During local public hearings across the Navajo Nation, specifically in Shiprock, Aneth and Olijato, the EPA has distributed the form and urged tribal members to sign.

“We are also concerned for our neighbors and whether this form is being circulated in other communities. Not only is this effort hurting Navajo people, but all those in the Four Corners. Think twice before you sign this form. We must hold U.S. EPA fully accountable for their negligence,” said Vice-President Nez.